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Message Text

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TO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
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S E C R E T STATE 011046

NODIS

FOL BEIRUT 0185 SENT ACTION SECSTATE JAN 12, 1978 REPEATED
TO YOU QUOTE

S E C R E T BEIRUT 0185

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E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: POL, LE
SUBJECT: ARAB-ISRAEL: SOME THOUGHTS ON THE ROLE OF THE PLO

1. SUMMARY. WHATEVER ITS SHORTCOMINGS, THE PLO REMAINS THE ONLY ORGANIZATION WITH ANY CLAIM TO REPRESENT PALESTINIANS. WE THINK WE SHOULD LEAVE PLO MODERATES WITH SOME HOPE OF
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PARTICIPATING EVENTUALLY IN A DIPLOMATIC SETTLEMENT, OTHERWISE CONTROL OF ORGANIZATION IS GOING TO RADICALS AND WE CAN EXPECT FATAH TO REVERT TO TERRORIST ROLE. THIS WILL AFFECT DURABILITY OF ANY SETTLEMENT AS WELL AS OUR OWN DIPLOMATIC, ECONOMIC AND MILITARY INTERESTS. END SUMMARY.

2. SOME STATEMENTS BY SENIOR USG OFFICIALS DURING PAST FEW

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MONTHS HAVE GIVEN THE IMPRESSION WE BELIEVE PLO HAS OPTED OUT
OF THE PEACE PROCESS AND THAT THE USG, HAVING MADE AN UN-
SUCCESSFUL EFFORT TO ESTABLISH DIRECT CONTACT, IS NOW WRITING
OFF THAT ORGANIZATION. THIS IS A NATURAL REACTION TO PLO
UNWILLINGNESS TO ACCEPT RESOLUTION 242AND TO THE TRIPOLI
CONFERENCE RESOLUTIONS.

3. THE PLO IS A DIFFICULT ORGANIZATION TO WORK WITH. IT
IS A CONGERIES OF OFTEN CONFLICTING GROUPS AND INTERESTS
CONSTITUTIONALLY UNABLE TO MAKE UP ITS MIND OFFICIALLY TO
DO ANYTHING POSITIVE WITH REGARD TO ISRAEL. BY ALL ACCOUNTS,
YASSIR ARAFAT IS A PROFESSIONAL LIAR. THE DUPLICITY AND
TERRORIST ACTIVITIES OF THE VARIOUS GROUPS IN THE PLO
ARE A MATTER OF RECORD. ARAFAT HIMSELF IS UNABLE, EVEN IN
PRIVATE CONVERSATION, TO SAY THE PALESTINIANS WILL BE
PERMANENTLY SATISFIED WITH THE WEST BANK AND GAZA, BECAUSE
HE KNOWS HABBASH AND HIS ILK WILL NOT BE. NO WONDER THE
ISRAELIS DON'T WANT TO DEAL WITH HIM.

4. NEVERTHELESS, THE PLO IS THE ONLY ORGANIZATION WITH A
SERIOUS CLAIM TO REPRESENT THE PALESTINIANS, BOTH IN THE
DIASPORA AND IN THE AREAS CONTROLLED BY ISRAEL. SADAT, HUSSEIN
AND KHALID CANNOT SPEAK FOR THE PALESTINIANS. NEITHER CAN
ASAD, BOUMEDIENE OR QADDHAFI OR THE RULERS OF IRAQ.

5. IT MAY BE POSSIBLE FOR GOVERNMENTS TO NEGOTIATE A SETTLE-
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MENT IGNORING THE PLO AND THE DIASPORA AND CONFINED TO EGYPT,
ISRAEL AND JORDAN. IT IS EVEN POSSIBLE THAT SUCH A SETTLE-
MENT WOULD GENERATE A MOMENTUM TOWARDS PEACE AND THAT THE PLO
AND OTHER DIASPORA GROUPS WOULD DIE ON THE VINE. WE THINK
THIS LATTER IS UNLIKELY, HOWEVER, UNLESS WE ARE ABLE TO OFFER
THE DIASPORA SOMETHING MASSIVE IN THE WAY OF COMPENSATION AND
IMMIGRATION FACILITIES. EVEN THEN THERE WOULD BE FIERCE
OPPOSITION FROM PALESTINIAN ACTIVISTS WHO HAVE ALWAYS REJECTED
EFFORTS TO LIQUIDATE THE PROBLEM THROUGH RESETTLEMENT,
AND IT IS BY NO MEANS CLEAR THAT A COMPENSATION-IMMIGRATION
TACTIC WOULD WORK.

6. WHATEVER FORM SETTLEMENT TAKES, THE PLO ATTITUDE IS
LIKELY TO PLAY A CRITICAL ROLE IN DETERMINING DIASPORA AND
WEST BANK ATTITUDES. THE ISRAELIS AND HUSSEIN WILL PROBABLY
BE ABLE TO FIND SOME NON-PLO WEST BANKERS TO RUN A PALESTINIAN
ENTITY FEDERATED WITH JORDAN, BUT UNLESS IT IS ACCEPTED BY THE
DIASPORA AND THE PLO, ITS CREATION WILL NOT SETTLE THE
PALESTINE PROBLEM AND WILL NOT BRING AN END TO PALESTINIAN
POLITICAL AGITATION. RATHER, PALESTINIAN RESENTMENT AND
DESPERATION, AT LEAST IN THE DIASPORA, WILL INCREASE.

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7. WE THINK IT IS CLEAR THAT THE MODERATES IN THE PLO
HAVE COMMITTED THEMSELVES TO DIPLOMACY AS A MEANS OF REACHING
GLOBAL SETTLEMENT. WHENEVER USG OFFICIAL STATEMENTS HAVE
REFLECTED AN UNDERSTANDING OF PALESTINIAN CONCERNS AND SUGGESTED
POSSIBLE WILLINGNESS UNDER CERTAIN CONDITIONS TO DEAL WITH
THE PLO, THESE MODERATES HAVE BEEN STRENGTHENED AND PLO
AS A WHOLE HAS TENDED TO ADOPT A MORE REASONABLE PUBLIC
POSTURE. ON THE OTHER HAND, WHENEVER THE USG APPEARS TO
BE REJECTING PALESTINIAN RIGHTS, THE PLO MOVES TOWARDS
EXTREMISM. A SETTLEMENT THAT EXCLUDES MODERATES
WILL MEAN THEIR DEMISE AND THE TAKEOVER OF THE PLO BY THE
RADICALS--HABBASH, WADIA HADDAD, ETC.--AND FATAH
DISTINGUISHED FROM ALREADY RADICAL (AS PFLP, ETC.) WILL THEN RE-
VERT TO TERRORISM. ITS CAPABILITIES IN THAT RESPECT ARE
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IMPRESSIVE, AND SUCH A DEVELOPMENT WOULD HAVE SERIOUS IMPLICATIONS
FOR OUR DIPLOMATIC, MILITARY AND ECONOMIC ESTABLISHMENTS ABROAD,
AND PERHAPS AT HOME AS WELL. IN BEIRUT IN PARTICULAR WE
WOULD HAVE TO RECONSIDER OUR POSTURE, WHICH HAS BEEN POSTU-
LATED ON OUR INFORMAL SECURITY LIAISON WITH FATAH-- A LINK
UNLIKELY TO SURVIVE RADICALIZATION.

8. RADICALIZATION OF THE PLO AND FATAH AND THE POLARIZATION NOW
DEVELOPING BETWEEN EGYPT AND SYRIA WOULD REINFORCE EACH OTHER
AND MAKE ACCEPTANCE OF A SETTLEMENT BY SYRIA AND LEBANON
LESS LIKELY, IF NOT IMPOSSIBLE. AS WE HAVE SAID ELSEWHERE,
THE DURABILITY OF THE PEACE WILL BE A DIRECT FUNCTION OF THE
UNIVERSALITY OF ITS ACCEPTANCE AMONG THE ARABS. WE WOULD
NOT EXPECT IT TO LAST LONG IF SYRIA AND LEBANON ARE NOT ON
BOARD. FURTHERMORE, IF FATAH ADOPTS A MORE RADICAL STANCE,
THE INSTABILITY WHICH NOW PREVAILS IN LEBANON WILL
LEAD TO FIGHTING SOONER RATHER THAN LATER. AT SOME POINT THE
ISRAELIS WILL FEEL OBLIGED TO INTERVENE AND WE WILL
BE OFF TO THE RACES AGAIN.

9. RADICALIZATION MAY OCCUR NO MATTER WHAT WE DO ABOUT
THE PLO, BUT WE THINK WE SHOULD TRY TO PREVENT IT IF WE CAN.
ONE WAY IS TO HOLD OUT TO THE MODERATES THE HOPE THAT SOME-
WHERE DOWN THE LINE THEY WILL BE ALLOWED TO HAVE SOME SAY
IN WHAT TRANSPIRES AT JERUSALEM OR GENEVA AND IN THE
WEST BANK. WE ARE NOT SUGGESTING THAT WE OPEN CONTACT
WITH THE PLO (ALTHOUGH WE THINK THAT WOULD BE DESIRABLE)
BECAUSE WE REALIZE HOW DIFFICULT THAT WOULD BE. WE
ARE SUGGESTING, HOWEVER, THAT WE AVOID STATEMENTS
INDICATING WE ARE TURNING OUR BACK ON THE PLO, AND THAT
WE MAKE IT CLEAR, AS DR. BRZEZINSKI DID ON FACE THE
NATION ON JANUARY 8, THAT THE OPTION TO TALK IS STILL
OPEN IF THE PLO WILL ACCEPT 242 AND ISRAEL'S RIGHT TO
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EXIST.

10. DEPARTMENT PASS TO OTHER AREA POSTS AS DESIRED.
PARKER UNQUOTE VANCE

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Message Attributes

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